Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/11/08 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302050031-1

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-A

WASHINGTON TIMES
28 June 1985

Castro snuffs cigar on Soviet rift rumors

By Roger Fontaine
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Brushing aside rumors of strains in the Moscow-Havana connection, Cuban leader Fidel Castro has told interviewers that relations with the Soviet Union are "excellent, better than ever."

The ringing affirmation was clearly an attempt to dispel any notion that his absence from the funeral of former Soviet President Konstantin Chernenko signaled trouble in the communist world.

The interview, lasting 25 hours, was scheduled for publication in the August issue of Playboy magazine. It was conducted by Rep. Mervyn M. Dymally, D-Calif., and Jeffrey Elliot, a free-lance writer.

The communist leader, who has been in power for 26 years, dismissed any advantage for Cuba if the U.S. trade embargo were lifted.

"I can tell you in all frankness our relations with the Soviet Union are excellent, better than ever," he said.

The interview in late March stretched over five days — his longest interview to date.

He vigorously denied that his absence from the Chernenko funeral last March indicated any rift with Moscow and he offered an elaborate explanation for it.

"[It] occurred at a time when I had an enormous amount of work. On the day of his death, we had just concluded a women's congress to which I had devoted several days' intense work," Mr. Castro said.

"I worked for 42 consecutive hours. No rest or sleep. Since I had other visitors in town the following days and I was worried about keeping them waiting . . . I decided to ask my brother Raul to represent me at the funeral," he added.

Mr. Castro underlined his long, unwavering commitment to Marxism, denying that U.S. hostility had driven him into the Soviet camp. He said he was "a Marxist" even before he entered prison after his abortive attack on Moncada barracks in July of 1953 — the Cuban leader's earliest claim to Marxism to date.

"Before our defeat at Moncada, which sent me to prison, I already had acquired the deepest convictions. I had acquired them earlier, upon reading books about socialism. I was already a utopian communist. I became convinced of the irrationality, the madness of capitalism just by studying its economics," he said.

"I was in my second year in law school when I felt inclined toward Marx's theories. I did not have the knowledge I have today, but if I hadn't had a Marxist orientation, I would not have conceived of the struggle against Batista," he added.

Mr. Castro said the prospect of trade with the United States held little appeal for him.

"Frankly, the United States has fewer and fewer things to offer Cuba. If we were able to export our products to the United States, we would have to start making plans for new lines of production to be exported to the United States, because everything we are going to produce in the next five years has already been sold to other markets," Mr. Castro told his interviewers.

"We would have to take them away from the other socialist countries in order to sell them to the United States, and the socialist countries pay us much higher prices," he added.

Mr. Castro dismissed any suggestion that the Soviet Union had placed pressure on Cuba to discipline its economy or align itself fully with Moscow's foreign policy.

"I cannot remember a single time when the Soviets have attempted to tell us what to do in our foreign or domestic policy," he said.

He underlined his loyalty to Moscow by repeatedly blaming the United States for the cold war and the arms race, asserting that the Soviet Union's military buildup was a response to being "surrounded by nuclear bombers, nuclear submarines, military bases, spy bases, electronic installations."

"[The Soviet] response reflects decisions made in Washington — the desire to protect themselves against possible U.S. aggression. But they are not the culprits. They are not to blame for the arms race," he said.

Mr. Castro took pains to defend Moscow on other sensitive questions, including the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Calling Afghanistan "one of the most backward countries in the world," Mr. Castro said the revolution of April 1978 had been subverted by the CIA and that Soviet assistance was requested by two Afghan government leaders.

Although President Castro avoided directly defending Soviet methods employed against Afghan rebels, he told the interviewers that the Soviets have a legitimate stake in preserving "the Afghan Revolution."

"I think Afghanistan could be a nonaligned country — but one in which the revolutionary regime was maintained," Mr. Castro said.

Mr. Castro took a hard line on El Salvador, defending by implication the Soviet bloc's right to assist Marxist forces in the region.

He expressed his full support for El Salvador's Marxist guerrillas, and dropped earlier talk of support for a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Mr. Castro said the U.S. object in El Salvador was "to exterminate every last revolutionary; more generally, to destroy once and for all the spirit of rebellion in this Central American people."

The interview with Playboy magazine is the latest of lengthy interviews Mr. Castro has given to American news organizations.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/11/08 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302050031-1